5: Harrison D-4 (1912-1924) 1924 M1 Middle East
Bedouin M54

dividual Arab is free to transfer his allegiance to another chieftain if he so desires. Such a transfer quite frequently takes place. In a loose general way each tribe has certain areas over which it grazes its camels and its goats and sheep. In proportion to the number of animals the area covered is enormous, for throughout the hot, dry summer months locations must be frequently changed and new pastures found. The prosperity of the desert Arab, poor as it is at the best, depends on a rainfall so scanty that one marvels at the existence of any life at all. There are whole districts, like the Great Southern Desert and the black plain encountered between Hasa and Riyadh, where not even the hardiest Bedouin attempts to live. In winter the temperature goes down so low that frost is seen, and in the summer the country glows with heat like a furnace. No mineral resources are known at present, and there is no reason to suppose that the most careful scientific search would find any.

Bedouins who live in the desert own a certain number of camels, and turn them out to graze over large areas. Camels require little water and can go for three days, if necessary, without a drink, an ability which adds enormously to their value in a country where it is frequently necessary to travel scores of miles to find a well. The camel is the one support of Bedouin life. Camel's milk is the principal article of diet, with a few dates for a dessert and camel's meat as an addition for feasts and high days. The hair of the camel furnishes clothes, and his back affords the only method of transportation possible in the desert. Indeed the Arab looks on the camel as God's special gift to the desert nomad, and he is not far mistaken.

Where wells are somewhat close together and the for-

M1 Middle East
BEDOUINS MJ4

With the improvements of communication and construction of pipe- 369 178
lines there has been an ever-increasing mutual contact between the nomads and the settled people of village and town. While tribal sheikhs are the first to come under the influence of modernization, the tribesmen are also gradually adopting the mode of existence of settled society.

CHAPTER 1

Definition of the Area under Consideration

This paper will limit itself primarily to the problem of 361 121
sedentarization of the nomadic populations in the countries of the Fertile Crescent, that is: Iraq, Syria, Jordan (Transjordan) and Israel (Palestine), an area which distinguishes itself by its Moslem Arab majority,[1] its striking similarities of natural environment and social organization. Saudi Arabia was included in this study because of the inter-relations which exist between the Bedouin of the Arabian and Syrian deserts. Tribes of the Anezeh Confederation wander from Saudi Arabia through Jordan into Syria and back and sections of the Shammar migrate back and forth between Arabia and Iraq.

Desert and Steppe

The chief common natural feature of the area is of a geo- 132 133

---

1. With the exception of the Kurdish language used by the Kurds in Syria and Iraq, Aramaic spoken by the Nestorian Christians in Kurdistan and in a few villages in Syria, and Hebrew spoken by the Jewish community of Israel, the area is Arabic in character.

132 graphic-climatic characters[1] Regions with hot, rainless summers
133 and cool, wet winters where cultivation is possible and enormous expanses of desert with extremes of high temperatures and almost complete dryness where nothing but rough grasses, hardier shrubs can grow. The amount of annual precipitation will make the difference between the desert and soum, it is ultimately the climatic conditions which will determine where and when cultivation is possible and what types of crops may be selected. The dividing line between the arid desert and the cultivated land is not a rigidly defined boundary. Generally there is a gradual transition from the soum to the barren desert, steppe land[2] as a rule constituting the intervening belt. The width of the semi-desert or steppe land is not identical in all the regions, and it is not static. Throughout the ages it has varied in response to human factors.[3]

133 The steppe is the permanent domain of the nomads who breed
361 sheep and goats, and the camping area of the camel Bedouin during the hot summer months when life in the desert is intolerable.

---

1. For a more detailed description of the common geographic characteristics of the Middle East see: Patai, 1952. As the author deals with the entire area of the Middle East: North Africa, the Arabian Peninsula, the Iranian Plateau and Asia Minor, his numerical percentages of desert and soum as well as settled and nomadic people are not necessarily applicable to the more limited region which is considered in this paper.
2. Districts receiving 200 - 300 mm of rain have steppe character, while tracts whose annual precipitation remains below this figure may be regarded as desert. Cf. Bonne, 1948, p. 149.
3. The shifting boundary line between desert and soum is not the result of changing natural conditions like climatic changes as it has been variously suggested.

12: Glubb G-3 (1930-1946) 1948 MG1 Jordan
Bedouins m 54

desert like a bird is a European illusion. The bedouin, it is true, will make his camel gallop in a battle. Good riding camels will travel at a jog-trot for considerable distances. But a journey of several hundred miles is chiefly performed at a walk. The camel covers long distances owing to its powers of endurance and the hardihood of its rider. Twenty hours' riding a day at five miles an hour makes a hundred miles, and four hours' rest will often suffice the bedouins.

These long hours of slow movement are sometimes an intense weariness. The country traversed is often featureless or only slightly undulating plains. The saddle, a wooden framework with a goat-skin and saddle-bag thrown over it, soon rubs sores on the thighs of the beginner.

The worst enemy of the inexperienced camel rider is the heat and glare, especially near Iraq or on the shores of the Red Sea, for the uplands of the hinterland are cooler. On our crossing of the Syrian desert, however, we suffered not from the heat but from the cold. Not a tree or a cliff was to be found to break the violence of that cutting north wind, which seemed to howl around us day and night. It blew round our legs as we sat shivering on our camels, it bore away our voices so that we could not hear one another speak. It filled our stale bread and sticky dates with sand when we dismounted to eat.

Occasionally this dumb and hopeless misery was forgotten in a wild alarm, a glimpse of raiders, a swift flight down little valleys. Once topping a small ridge, we came in sight of a group of camelmen riding towards us at a range of only a few hundred yards. Qasim, who had the raider's eye for country, raced down into a little hollow on our right. Keeping in low ground, we hit our camels sharply and dashed on at top speed. Suddenly our leader pulled up, jumped off, hobbled his camel and ran forward up a low ridge. We followed his example as best we could, and flung ourselves on the ground a few yards from him, loading as we did so. The other party had not seen us, and by raising my head slightly I could see them riding along, unconcernedly talking together. They were within close range now. The gear on their saddles and the fact that they were driving a camel laden with sacks proved that they were not raiders. Qasim suddenly stood up

k Dickson G-5 (1929-47) 1951 MI 1 Kuwait
Bedouins MJ4

CHAPTER II

Autumn Stirrings

It is early November, the 2nd to be accurate, and I have ordered 132
Salim al Muzaiyin to move his camp out into the *barr*, preparatory to 361
my joining him. We have had a week's steady south wind, clouds are banking up in the West, and we have had distant thunder and lightning. Most of the tribes have left water and are scattering over the hinterland in search of suitable grazing grounds, for the promise of rain is near. All the tent families go off on their own and camp in twos and threes, well apart from their neighbours (a mile or so perhaps), yet within sound of rifle-shot in case of an alarm, when all must come to the help of the person attacked.

The Badawin camped round Kuwait on the Shamiyah and Dasma 361
wells have already moved off, some to the Kabd region, some to 'Adan, some to the Huzaim and some to the Grain district. The Fidawiyah, under their Amir, Haif bin Hajraf, of the Sulaiman section of the 'Ajman, accompanied by Nahar and 'Ubaid al Mutalaqqim,* stout old warriors both, have gone to the Humatiyat region beyond Manaqish and the Shaqq, 60 miles from Kuwait. They have 223
cunningly chosen their region because the *hubara* have arrived in the Dibdibba, and hunting with hawks is a favourite sport. The Amir, and every self-respecting young brave, possesses his hawk, a *barr* or *shāhin* (*sakar*, *laggar* or *shāhin* falcon), and all go out as they get opportunity, and bring back game for their wives' cooking-pot. Some, especially the 'Awazim, like also to hunt hare and gazelle with 224
saluqis, and great is the excitement when venison is brought home. 251
The young hunters go far from their tents, and if they find that the gazelle meat will not keep, they spread the carcase out in the shape of a mat, having removed the ribs and larger bones, and

* Was one of the forty who helped Ibn Sa'ud to capture Riyadh, though not among the actual twenty-three who rushed Qasr 'Ajlan in the heart of the city.

k Dickson G-5 (1929-47) 1951 MI 1 Kuwait MI1
Bedouins MJ4

B 224 251 prepare the venison with salt into what they call *yullak*, a sort of biltong, slashing it into long slices to allow the salt to penetrate and to enable ribbon-like strips to be easily removed at home for food.

k 192 This is a season for rejoicing, the rains are close at hand, there is a nip in the air of a morning and fires are in demand at night. Once again the desert comes to life after the long, weary, soul-killing heat of summer, the scorching suffocating dustcorms, the need to stay close-camped near water, and the ever-present dread that your enemy knows where you are and by a sudden dash may carry off your camels, nay, all you possess, in one swift raid.

B 312 192 For water, the various tent dwellers send in camels to the nearest wells, often as far as 30 miles away, once in five, six or seven days. Neither camel, sheep nor man is very thirsty these days, so water is no longer the immediate necessity of life. As the first rains fall and grass begins to come up, water is less and less required by the live-stock, till finally in the full *rabi'* (spring) when grass is well up and succulent, only man requires it.

B 223 k 225 This is the season also when the Shaikhs of Kuwait, as well as all other rulers in Arabia, start going deep into the high desert in search of *houbara*. The practice of hunting on camel-back has gone. The motor car serves the purpose better. Great hunters, like His Highness Shaikh Ahmad, Shaikh 'Ali al Khalifah and Shaikh Salim al Hamud, are out two or three times a week. They nearly always spend at least one night bivouacking in the blue (*khalla*) without tent or covering beyond their *'abbas*. It is unmanly and soft to take even a small shelter. The huntsman and falcon bearers (*khaddam*) are all of the Rashaida tribe, born Essus all, with eyes like their own hawks, and with the uncannyest knowledge of the habits of the *houbara*. The courtly and religious Nazzal, famous over North and Central Arabia for his knowledge and eye for country, is there, so are Sa'ud bin Nimran, the lion-hearted and jovial; Addas, the hawk-eyed; Ghuraiyib, the smeller of *houbara* from afar, and great raider of war days; Sa'ad, the tracker; Mirshid al Shammari, of the renowned Ibn Twala clan, and old Saif bin Ta'ami, companion of the great Mubarak in many a past raid.

Of hawks we have the famous "Dhiffi", "Kabeir", "Sultan" and

1/1 [early November -- Ardhiyat]

h Dickson G-8 (1929-47) 1951 MI 1 Kuwait
Bedouins MJ4

Horrors of Summer

THE ANNUAL MOVES

312 861 285 182 221 During the summer months, i.e. June, July, August, September and half October, the Badawin world of North-East Arabia concentrates on its wells (*gulleh*), which in each case are groups of wells lying close together and in number anything from five to fifty. Here they camp (*igaiyashun*), their tents close together, their herds of camels and sheep grazing in close proximity, for the animals now have to be watered daily. Here the weary and long agony of summer has to be endured. Man and woman, child as well as horse, sheep and camel go through a period of real hardship and suffering. The heat is intense (the tent temperature often reaches 125° F.), supplies are scarce, *muzdhilah* is a torture, and last but not least the Badawin and his stock are vulnerable to any raiding party that may be paying off old scores, or thinks to add to its stock of camels. For in summer the whole Badawin world knows where each Shaikh So-and-So is camped.

Even in peace-time there is therefore always some anxiety, but if hostilities should exist between two tribes or groups of tribes, and the Central Government is busy elsewhere, then over a wide area no man's life or cattle are safe; and in addition to having to endure the intense heat and privation of the Arabian summer, strong patrols have continually to move about and guard the camel-herds and bring them in at night. Nor is this all, for if peace reigns, summer is the time when the *zakat* tax has to be paid to the Central Government or Ruler of the State. So on top of all his troubles, and just when he is most hard up, the Badawin may any day expect his lord and master's tax-gatherers suddenly to appear with a *surfya* (armed party). Woe betide him who tries to evade this tax! There is no escape, for like the enemy, the tax-gatherer knows where each Badawin shaikh has camped for the summer.

735 651

The enemy when anarchy exists, the Government official when peace reigns, have each got the wretched Badawin secure in summer. Both are hated; both, he believes, are out to hurt him, and both are the foe of him and of his kind.

221 182 At long last October, or the warm season (the rains) arrives and small clouds begin to gather in the far west and south, and once more

k Dickson G-5 (1929-47) 1951 MI 1 Kuwait
Bedouins MJ4

Joys of Cold Weather

there is a stir in the Badawin world. Suhail (Canopus) has also been* seen, low down in the southern horizon, which to the Badawin means the end of the dread summer, for man and beast then need less to drink. Even the blood grows cooler of a sudden.

A general cheerfulness now takes hold of the Badawin tent-dweller. He has safely weathered one more dread summer, the life-giving rains are coming and with them abundance once again. He joyfully packs up his belongings and by the 15th of October is ready to move. The end of the month sees him gone, rain or no rain. At first he does not go too far from water, for his camels, sheep and mares must still be watered frequently.

With the first fall of rain, however, he is gone on his great annual migration, or, to be more accurate, his grand circular tour. The various sections of the tribe now move together or follow each other from grazing ground to grazing ground, till they have systematically passed over and eaten down all the *'arfaj*, *nassi* and *hamdh* grasses that the rains have brought in their train. Should rains be delayed in a particular area, the tribe skip it and pass on to where the country has become green. The night lightning and the heavy bank of clouds seen of an evening far away on the horizon are their surest guides.

Certain areas are known to be nearly always good in autumn, and to these the shaikhs will usually take their own best camels with them.

This moving in the wake of the grazing is spread over November, December, January, February, March and April, till by May all nomad households are once more beginning to converge slowly on to water. It is a sad period, this having to go, so to speak, "home again" after the glorious annual holiday. During the migration months the tribal tents change ground about every ten days, both for sanitary reasons and because the grass has been eaten up—so the moves are slow, leisurely and pleasant. Nor are distances to the next camp great. It is a period of joy for all, women renew their winter garments, make *lebes*, wear their best frocks and amuse themselves among the flowers. The better-off men hawk the lesser bustard (*hubara*), hunt gazelle

* In Najd Canopus is usually seen between 1st September and 10th September. In Kuwait if the sky is clear it is seen any time after the 20th September, and at about 3-30 a.m., very low down in the south over the Bridal Gate.

k Dickson G-5 (1929-67) 1951 MI 1 Kuwait
Bedouins MJ4

511 what the world would call honest methods. Hence if *ne* cannot live on somebody's largesse he must steal or raid. He cannot spin, to work [464] he is ashamed. If he is forbidden to raid (as is the case under Bin Sa'ud's regime to-day), the fight for life is a particularly severe one, when he is not provided with an occupation to enable him to earn. Year in, year out, the poorer type of Badawin—and there are many tens of thousands of such—never gets a "square" meal according to our standards. He probably has meat only when he can cadge it off somebody more fortunate than himself, or when his shaikh gives a dinner party.

262 His own food for most of the year consists of only camel's milk and a handful of dates per day. The camel-herd gets even less than this.

291 The Badawin's clothes are on the same scanty scale as his food, a thin cotton *dishdásha* (smock), replaced only when it falls off his back with age, and a threadbare *'abba* (cloak), *kaffiyah* and thin rope *agál* (head cloth and head cord), are all he has to cover his ill-nourished body. Yet all this makes for toughness and hardihood, and the average [132] Badawin seems made of steel. The lack of warm clothing is probably the hardest thing in life that he has to bear, for in winter the temperature often falls below freezing point, and the winds are of ice, and cut the body through and through. I have never in my life felt so cold as in the desert a hundred miles inland of Kuwait when a *yúkí* or *jaluú* 262 wind has been blowing in December or January. Yet in spite of the 574 hard life, the Badawin is never in danger of actual starvation or of dying from want. His *ahl* (family) would never permit this, nor would the system of affording three days' hospitality to all and sundry —such a splendid feature of democratic Arabia—allow of a man reaching such straits. A person who is down and out, without a penny to his name, would in reality be far worse off in London than in Arabia, where he could always hope to find a black tent or two to sponge on.

[78] A Badawin's dream and ambition in life is to possess about a dozen 231 camels, next a wife, and afterwards a mare, half a hundred sheep and a *saláfi*—I am, of course, assuming that he starts with a rifle and a *dhalál* (riding camel). Give the desert man these essentials and he is a made man, for both camels and sheep double themselves in three years. Any male lambs that are born, he kills for food, the females he

L Dickson G-5 (1929-47) 1951 MI 1 Kuwait
Bedouins MJ4

521 about. Yet gossips they are, and expert in tearing others' reputations.
658 Many a desert tragedy has resulted from too glib a tongue. Ordinary
sexual matters are discussed before small children with a frankness
964 and simplicity which modern educationists might approve, but which
an English person may find at times embarrassing. The bearing of
their young by camels, mares and ewes is not only an everyday topic,
but mothers will take their children to watch the progress of such
events, alongside their menfolk.

937 On the whole, Badawin women are extremely moral, though they might readily succumb to temptation were it to come their way. Fortunately it does not.

They go in for love affairs, of course, and married women are not above falling desperately in love with other men than their husbands. A woman's only hope in such a case (unless her man happens to be her first cousin) is to tell her husband the whole truth, and beg him to divorce her. This happens fairly often among the rank and file, though not among the senior ladies of the tribe or the shaikh's wives. Sir Richard Burton has said somewhere that among Badawin women who were separated from their menfolk during long absences in the desert when at war, abnormal and unnatural living was not uncommon. This I think a libel, or at least a grave exaggeration.

THE DAILY ROUND OF A BADAWIN FAMILY—"AN AUTUMN STUDY"

132. Time, Early November; Place, Wafra, 30 miles from the sea in the Kuwait Neutral Zone.

[342] 512 The tent is pitched on a slight rise in the ground, so that if rain comes the water will not flood the interior. Everyone is busy from earliest dawn to nightfall, especially the women and girls. A little rain has fallen, the first for eight months, and grass has just started sprouting in the hollows. Both camels and sheep are thin and scarcely able to walk any distance. The summer has been a terribly severe one. More rain is urgently needed, else the grass that has come up will wither again. The head of the family has ridden off on his mare the previous evening to see if better grazing exists 10 miles away. He will not be back till sunset to-day.

000 At 4 a.m. one of the men-servants gives the 'adhan (call to prayer),

k Dickson G-5 (1929-47) 1951 MI 1 Kuwait
Bedouins MJ4

all he wants. Coffee then goes round, and master, servants and women go early to bed.

That night Allah the All-seeing, the All-merciful, is good to his people. As the camp sleeps, a great thundercloud appears and gradually creeps up from the far north-west. Nearer and nearer it comes till at 3 a.m. it is exactly overhead. There is a death-like stillness, and even the camp dogs cease their baying and the sleepers turn uneasily in their sleep. The air is oppressive, even hot. Suddenly a cold chill wind begins to blow; the shepherd watching his sheep in front of the tent wakes his master and whispers, "Allah Kerim, Insha'llah it will rain, the mercy of God is coming, Oh Allah, give us of thy blessing". Suddenly there is a soul-raising thunderclap followed by a simultaneous blaze of forked lightning, which lights up the whole landscape a vivid bluey-white. Clap after clap follows; each rolling away in the distance like salvos of great artillery. Shouts and cries rise from the camp. The men rush to the camels and sheep, the women to the tent ropes, and then with a dull roar growing every instant deeper and closer, the rain comes at last. At first great heavy drops the size of small saucers, then in a few seconds the downpour. And what a downpour! Fortunately there is no wind but just a deep booming roar, as the water pours down in sheets. For ten minutes everyone holds on to what he can grip, expecting the squall which usually follows such rain. But none comes. Then cries of joy as the open spaces round the camp site begin to fill with water. The tents perched up on higher ground than the surrounding country are safe from flood, but by 3.30 a.m. the countryside is a vast shallow lake. By 3.45 a.m. the rain thins off. Regardless of everything, men, women and children rush forth to collect the delicious rain-water into every kind of utensil they can lay hands on: water-skins, basins, tins and cooking pots of every description are made to serve. When these are filled women and children sit in the water and literally wallow in it for sheer joy. The men rouse the camels and make them drink knee deep in the fresh brown sea. Everyone is delirious, for they have been drinking brackish and even salt water for the last nine months. The great blessing has come at last. God is great, God is good to the *Muslimin*. The incongruous part of it all is that it is still pitch dark. No one has a lantern, no one cares. At length dawn breaks. Prayers,

k Dickson G-5 (1929-47) 1951 MI 1 Kuwait
Bedouins MJ4

Rejoicing

Chap. III

At length dawn breaks. Prayers, 512 [188] 182

genuine prayers of heartfelt thanks are said and the storm passes away. What a scene daylight brings! Each tent, like a little Noah's ark, is perched safely on its small Ararat, and a sea of fresh water for a couple of miles all round gives the appearance of the Flood of Bible story. Away to the right are some low hills, and to the left one can see the water tumbling down their sides as the various nullahs *sail* (the Arab word for running in spate). You can hear the dull roar of these distant water-courses running full. The summer has ended at long long last. The Badawin world comes to life and is happy once more. "Now we shall see the *fagus* (truffles)", cry the delighted children.

(The above was a personal experience of 2nd November, 1933.)

k Dickson G-S (1929-47) 1951 MI 1 Kuwait
Bedouins MJ4

below it ready to make *leben* (sour milk) with, or, if necessary, to hang 415
a sheep's carcase on, preparatory to skinning it.

A fuller description and names of the articles found in both men's and women's portions of the tent will be found in Chapter V.

POSITION OF TENT WITH REGARD TO THE WIND

Tents are always pitched with one of their long sides facing in the 342
direction of the wind. Hence in the eastern and north-eastern part of 132
Arabia, where there are two very common prevailing winds, the *Shemâl* (north-west wind) and the *Kaus* (south-east wind), it is the general rule to see black tents pitched with their longer axis facing towards the north-west. This does not mean that tents are opened towards the side from which the wind is blowing—the contrary is the case, and the side of the tent is always closed in the direction from which the wind is blowing, and the sheltered side opened.

The side which is open is called *wejh al bait* (the face of the tent), the closed side *guffa al bait* (the back of the tent). Should the wind suddenly change, as often happens during the rainy season, it is necessary for the inhabitants of the tent to change the "face" of the tent at once. Otherwise the wind gets under the tent, billows it up, and if it does not carry it away, at least causes the tent poles to fall and lets the tent then collapse upon its occupants. A sudden change of wind therefore means confusion and lots of shouting. The owner's first and immediate orders are, "Change the back wall, my children, the wind has come", or in Arabic, *Jaina al hawa, dabburu al bait ya awalad*. The excited women and servants thereupon rush about, drop the front bamboo supports (facing the wind), quickly unpin the back curtains and carry them round to the side from which the wind is blowing, and again as quickly pin them on to the tent roof, and bury their bottom edges in the sand; the side poles are next put under the edge of the tent roof facing away from the wind, each under a rope, and lastly the tent partition curtains are taken down, reversed and fixed up again with the embroidered ends extending out of the tent and thrown back over the tent ropes. The whole process takes a surprisingly short time.

Of course, in very hot weather the Badawin wants to take advantage of the slightest breeze, so he rolls up the back curtain or unpins several

k Dickson G-5 (1929-47) 1951 MI 1 Kuwait
Bedouins MJ4

342 yards of it so as to let portions of it lie on the ground: the breeze in
132 this manner percolates into every part of the tent. If the sun is very strong, a locally woven carpet (usually some shade of orange) is hung up near the tent roof between poles and is pinned to the underside of the tent roof. This doubles the thickness of the tent and brings relief.

In very cold weather, on the other hand, the tent can be closed from the front by drawing inwards the embroidered ends of the *qdta* (which already extend several yards outside the tent) and by joining the ends near the middle of the tent side. The top edge is then pinned to the edge of the roof of the tent as is done in the case of the back curtain. This encloses the tent completely and gives great cosiness and warmth to the occupants. Similarly, the ends of the *rugg* are brought right round the guest quarters and the woman's cookhouse respectively, and turn those places into warm corners to sit in.

NOTE.—The men's quarter of a tent or *rubu'a* is always situated at the east end of the tent, irrespective of which way the tent is facing. This is the universal rule in Eastern and North-Eastern Arabia.

Similarly it is the rule for a tent to be pitched with its longer axis at right angles to the north-west wind (*Shamāl*). In inner Najd, and especially among 'Utaiba tribe, the longer axis facing the north-west is the rule, and the tent is opened at its ends only. The *rubu'a* here is at southern end.

THE TENT DOGS

231 Every tent has its watch-dogs, and also (especially amongst the 'Ajman, 'Awazim and Mutair) a *sulūqi* or two. The former are fierce, shaggy animals who usually have their ears cut off short to make them good fighters. Their heads are broad, rather like our bull-terrier type, and they are fierce and very powerfully built. These dogs guard the camels and sheep at night from wolves and strangers, and are trained to move round and round the tents all night in a large circle. The incoming or departing guest usually has a busy time keeping off these savage dogs, who bark at his heels in a most disconcerting manner, and are only kept back by a continual motion of his cane behind him, or
231 by the shouts of the occupants of the tent. The watch-dog usually
826 sleeps outside the women's apartments and is fed with little bits of rice, bread and dates that are left over from the meals. It is never allowed inside the tents, being unclean (*najis*). The *sulūqis* (pronounced *sulūqi*,

k Dickson G-5 (1929-47) 1951 MI 1 Kuwait MI1
Bedouins MJ4

on such wells, then it will have to pay *zakát* for that year to the Central Government in whose state it is a guest.

The first signs of the coming summer are the drying up of all desert grasses (*'ashib*), the mirage—which now flickers everywhere and seems to fill every small depression in the countryside with a little lake of water—and the sandstorms. The glare also becomes intense and makes the desert-dweller fold his *kaffiyah* or head-cloth across his face. The winds are hot as though driven out of a great furnace by some gigantic bellows. The traveller now finds himself mistaking bushes and animals for distant tents and men, especially at midday and as night draws near.

Men and animals now want to drink more often, so of necessity tents are brought closer to water.

The women in their *biyút sha'ar* (hair tents) also feel the effects of the sun and erect false roofs of saffron or other coloured rugs above their heads inside their tents, to keep out the stinging rays.

Both men and women grow palpably thinner, while all develop a much deeper tan than during the winter.

The most unpleasant feature of this half-season period is the sandstorm. These storms grow more and more frequent and vicious until by June the countryside seems to have taken on a permanent canopy of sand-haze which lodges in nostrils, eyes and throat. Alternating with these sandstorms come gentle south-east winds, or dead calms which bring up heavy dews in their train. These too are most trying.

By the 5th June the desert world, which has slowly been converging on the well-areas, now definitely goes to ground and camps on water. If these well-areas are popular, several thousand tents will congregate close together and as near to the well-heads as possible—the tents of the shaikhs and prominent men standing out of the general mass by reason of their size and the number of their poles.

At Jahrah in 1935, for instance, when Kuwait tribes as well as Dhafir, Shammar (Abda), Dahamsha ('Anizah) and 'Ajman details were camped there, the sight was a remarkable one, for well over three thousand black hair-tents were congregated in an area only 1 mile square.

About 10th June, if the year is a normal one, North-East Arabia and especially the Persian Gulf seaboard is visited by what is known as

k Dickson G-5 (1929-47) 1951 MI 1 Kuwait MJ1
Bedouins MJ4

K 132 calm, with heavy dew by day and night. It is a long weary month for men and women, now at the end of their tether and incapable of standing much more. Night and day you perspire heavily and continuously, and only a minimum of clothes can be endured. The sea temperature rises high by day, and during the night the thermometer registers anything from 85° F. to 90° F. Bathing is a warm water bath, and prickly heat attacks everyone.

B 132 K 132 The Badawin in particular feel this damp heat, which seems to penetrate their very bones, and brings out ailments of every description. The whole local world now longs and prays for the rise of *Suhail*, that tantalising twinkling star known to the West as Canopus, whose coming always brings relief. So powerful is this longing that after the 25th of August men get up hours before dawn to see if they can get a glimpse of that blessed constellation. At long last comes hope, usually in the shape of a camel courier from Najd. He brings the joyful news that ten days previously *Suhail* was seen in high Qasim. It must therefore be seen any moment now in Kuwait. Watch is redoubled and the keenest-eyed Rashaida hunters are set to search the southern skies about 3 a.m. at Jahrah and Subaihiyah, for there it is less misty than at Kuwait. At long last the star appears. Like wild fire the news is rushed into Kuwait, and spread abroad among the Badawin. The cry is raised: "*Suhail* has been seen, *Suhail* has been seen by so-and-so, thanks be to Allah, the Merciful. Summer is at an end, *al qaiẓ* is over."

K 132 Great is the rejoicing, and the Arab, being properly brought up to the belief that immediate relief follows, actually begins to feel cooler, though the European perceives but little change. The Arab's conviction is that the inside of a man's body now gets cooler, and so thirst is no longer painful, while water left out at night gets cool by dawn, whereas before it remained hot through the night.

By the 25th September the whole world can see and enjoy Canopus, and 15th October ushers in the joyous warm or rainy season, when the first clouds for six months are seen once more.

Anyone who has experienced an Arabian summer on the borders of the Persian Gulf, and has lived with the Badawin during that haunting period, will appreciate the immense relief that comes with the advent of the rains.

1st August or the month of 354 the 4 we dogs -- Archyal

k Dickson G-5 (1929-47) 1951 MI 1 Kuwait MI |
Bedouins MJ4

Accompaniments of Rain

Chap. XX

THE RAINS

The rains may arrive any time between the 1st October and 3rd November, and usually set in with a series of thunderstorms. Great and wild is the rejoicing when Kuwait first perceives, borne strongly on the breeze, the smell of the first rain on parched-up sand. I have described in Chapter III the scene of excitement when men, women and children rush out into the rain and collect the precious water into every possible utensil. Camels groan extra loud to testify their pleasure, and sheep set up a pandemonium of baa-ing. The city folk, normally dependent for their water on the Shatt al 'Arab, 100 miles away, act like their Badawin brethren, and endeavour to catch into every form of utensil the water running off their house-tops.

An annual visitor now makes its appearance in the desert. This is the *bint al mattar* (Daughter of Rain), a small plump-bodied spider, brilliantly scarlet in colour and with a body like velvet. It appears apparently from nowhere as soon as the first rain has wet the ground.

The next arrivals in Kuwait are old Badawin men bearing sprigs of green grass which they have brought to show their beloved Shaikh, with congratulations such as, "*ya tawal al 'umr* (O thou with long life) God has given good rain at So-and-So, there has been *sail* (the expression used to convey that water-channels have flowed), and so many hand-widths of rain have fallen (meaning the depth into the soil which the rain has penetrated), we come to show you the green grass (*'ashab*) that has come up". As bringers of good news they get, of course, suitable presents.

This is followed by other news brought in from various parts that *khabras* (lakelets) have formed at So-and-So, and will last for so many days.

Last of all comes news that the *hubara* or lesser bustard have made their appearance. From the shaikh downwards, out go all lovers of the chase, and hundreds of birds are brought into the town and to the various Badawin encampments as food. They are assuredly an additional gift of God.

If rain falls in October, truffles and mushrooms, great delicacies to every Badawin, appear in the following spring, and form the staple food of the tent-dweller and his family for weeks on end. Truffles

h Dickson G-5 (1929-47) 951 MI 1 Kuwait MI1
Bedouins MJ4

B 137 with *kubays* are verily, like the manna of old, Allah's reward to those who have endured the summer heat.

On the warm rains follow the new green shoots, and almost in a matter of hours, the yellow desert takes on a pale green hue. This rapidly develops till the advent of the December cold winds, when further growth is retarded until February and March. Then and only then does everything rush up into bloom, and flowers begin to cover the whole countryside. Nevertheless, the grass of October and November comes up sufficiently high to allow sheep to graze on it, though not without difficulty. This for the moment is all the Badawin asks.

WINTER

B 132 K 132 The period between the October rains and spring proper is known as *shita*, and lasts from about 15th November to the 15th of February. The cold now becomes intense, and the north-west winds cut to the marrow. Badawin men and women who can afford it go about in woollen top-boots. Similarly *farwahs* (fur-lined coats) are worn by the well-to-do from the shaikh downwards. The poor Badawin has a bad time, however, for his body, inured to the recent great heat of summer, can ill adjust itself to the biting cold. His threadbare summer cloak is all he has, and he therefore feels the cold even more than he did the heat.

To the European the cold of the Arabian winter and especially of the hinterland acts as a wonderful tonic. The desert air has a champagne effect about it, and nights in the desert are glorious experiences. As January draws nigh a series of frosts occur, usually about ten in number. At night the temperature in the hinterland drops to 29° F. and under, and water-skins freeze solid: an almost unbelievable change from the all too recent summer. If a north-west wind blows it can be very cold indeed on these frosty nights and nothing but an all-night fire will keep the sleeper alive.

I have visited the Karakoram and the Pamirs in my time, and have spent two winters at Gilgit, yet the cold of the Arabian desert seems to surpass anything I ever felt in those high altitudes. The explanation no doubt is that the Arabian summer saps a man's strength and leaves him ill prepared to fight such intense cold.

k Dickson G-5 (1923-47) 1951 MI 1 Kuwait M11
Bedouins MJ4

Heaven on Earth

Chap. XX

SPRING

Spring (*rabi'*) comes at last about 15th February, and if rains have been good, a truly marvellous spring it is. Wild flowers come up in profusion everywhere, and the countryside becomes a multi-coloured carpet. The Badawin is now in as near heaven as he can ever hope to be in this world. His camels and sheep graze in plenty, milk and *laben* are abundant, the sun's warm rays give new life to him, he grows fat and the whole world is rosy. It is then that the well-to-do from Kuwait, some one hundred families, imitate their nomad brethren and make for the high desert to enjoy four months of that Badawin existence which they have so recently abandoned. Back to the happy desert life and black hair-tents once more! Men, women and children, from the shaikh downwards, take part in this spring migration from the city, and what health and strength it brings them! Poorer town-Arabs as yet only half urbanised do their utmost to get out too, and if they cannot afford tents they plant themselves on kinsmen among the great Mutair, 'Ajman and 'Awazim tribes. By the end of spring everybody in the desert has got a new lease of life. They look definitely healthy, with rounded cheeks and well-covered body, a change indeed from their appearance at the end of summer.

Camels develop an enlarged hump, sheep an enormously fat tail and man lots of extra flesh, all a reserve of strength against the dreaded summer.

The Badawin will tell you that he prefers the summer, because he has no warm clothes or good food to keep him comfortable in the winter months. Yet were it not for the cold winter, his race would assuredly die out. It is the winter that keeps the inhabitant of Arabia the virile, tough and wiry person that he is. Had he a temperate instead of a torrid summer, his race would certainly be one of the finest in the world: and dangerous in proportion.

13: Thesiger T-3 (ca. 1949) 1950 MJ1 Saudi Arabia
Bedouin MJ4

178 619 they must leave their rifles at a police post, but once they have climbed back on to the escarpment they are free to do as they like, subject only to the restraints of tribal life. Similarly, while they are inside the towns of Inner Oman, where the Imam has established law and order, they must behave themselves, but once they are outside the walls they can only be controlled by diplomacy and not by force, while everywhere in the Dhahirah of Northern Oman jealous and often hostile sheikhs vie with each other in the lavishness of their hospitality and the scale of their gifts to win the support of the Badu. There no sheikh can enforce his authority over the tribes, and none of them would try, lest by doing so he should alienate their support in time of need.

133 312 To understand the Badu character and way of life you must understand the land in which they live—a harsh, unforgiving land which conditions their lives so that they, too, are hard, hard in body and mind. They live in the desert—that is to say, in country which, judged by ordinary standards, is waterless. This applies equally to the barren, broken limestone mountains near the southern coast, to the flat, featureless gravel plains, and to the sands of the Empty Quarter itself, where the mountainous dunes, some of which are 700 feet high, run one behind the other for hundreds of miles. There are, of course, some wells in this desert, but they are usually few and far between; the Sa'ar country has two permanent wells in it, Manwakh and Zamakh; the Manahil country has three or four. Thus in an area the size of Norfolk there might be two wells. I have myself twice travelled four hundred miles between wells. I admit that this is exceptional, but Badu have raided across these very stretches of desert, riding out and back again without touching at a well. You can think what this means when you realize that this distance is twice as far as from Dover to Edinburgh, and that these Arabs travelled at a speed of three miles per hour, relying only on the water which they could carry with them without foundering their camels, and that the camels themselves did not get a drink until they returned a month later.

137 221 ● 132 233 It seldom rains in this desert; in many parts it has not rained for five years, and I have been in places where not a drop of rain has fallen for twenty-five years. By Badu standards a couple of hours' heavy rain in the year means a good year. They cannot, therefore, cultivate, but have to depend for their livelihood on their small herds of camels, and in quest of the pasturage which springs up after rain they travel great distances. Most of this vegetation is not grass, but desert plants like the succulent yellow-flowering tribulus and heliotrope, and in the sands these plants will remain green after a few days' rain for as long as three and four years. But they do not last so long on the gravel plains and among the hills; in such places, however, grow scattered trees and bushes, such as the acacias, which afford valuable pasturage. Where there is rich grazing the Badu can remain for six and even nine months without water, for their camels get all the moisture they require from these green plants, and camels' milk suffices the Arabs themselves for food and drink. In the heat of summer the camels must be watered once a week, and if there is no well near the grazing on which they have wintered they must move back on to a permanent well and graze their herds as best they can on the

233 262

13: Thesiger T-3 (ca. 1949) 1950 MJ1 Saudi Arabia
Bedouin MJ4

drought-resisting trees and shrubs, which will at any rate keep them alive. Under such circumstances the milk supply gets very short and the Arabs suffer much from hunger, for milk is their staple food. Among the Badu in South-Western Arabia dates are a rare luxury, meat is seldom eaten except by guests for whom an animal has been slaughtered, and all grain has to be purchased in the villages.

You can see that it is a hard life with absolutely no margin. Hunger and thirst, heat and cold—bitter cold. Few people realize how cold it can be in these Arabian deserts. In summer the temperature rises to 120° in the shade, and there really is no shade, and the only water which these Badu have to drink is brackish and tastes like a strong dose of Epsom salts. In winter it is nearly freezing, and at night a herdsboy will scrape a shallow trench in the sand, lie down naked in it and then cover himself with his shirt. It certainly is a desperately hard life, and it is made even harder by continuous raiding and counter-raiding. Everyone is living the whole time in a state of suspense with his rifle in his hand and his eyes scanning the horizon. A herdsman sees some mounted Arabs in the distance and immediately collects his camels, which are never very numerous, and drives them off as fast as he can, for no one can afford to take any chances. If the people he has seen are friends they will signal by throwing up sand into the air or send one person forward alone waving his headcloth. Then, having established contact, they will ride over, ask the news—for Badu are always anxious to have the latest news—and let their mounts graze while they refresh themselves with the milk which the herdsman provides. Generally, to keep their herds alive at all on the scanty grazing, the Badu must scatter widely, and can put up no resistance against a raiding party which may be as many as two hundred strong. All they can do is to try to drive off their camels at the first hint of danger and, if they are robbed but themselves escape, collect their friends and set off in pursuit. The raiders consequently work fast, gather what spoil they can, and disappear. Sometimes, especially if the raid has failed and if they are pursued, they have a desperate time getting back, and, should there be a blood feud between the two tribes, they can expect no mercy if they are overtaken. I heard of one party of raiders who had raided four hundred miles, had failed to get any loot, and who, to keep themselves alive on their way back, had cut off and eaten the tails and ears of their camels. Sometimes a pursuit party from the steppes follows the raiders far into sands which are unknown to them. Should a strong wind get up and blow out the tracks, they may be lost, unable to follow the raiders to the wells which lie ahead, and unable to retrace their own tracks home. Yet ordinarily the Badu are not afraid of thirst. More than once they have told me that in winter it would be hunger, not thirst, which would kill them if they were left without food or water. This is an instance of Badu exaggeration, but I have met Arabs who have lasted as long as seven days without either food or water.

Many of them are wonderful trackers, for their very lives depend upon the accuracy with which they can read such signs. I remember once when I was riding across the desert with some of them how we came upon some half-obliterated marks in the sand. One of our party turned aside and